

THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF ALVIN PLANTINGA

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Abstract. In this article we intend to present Alvin Plantinga's epistemology by showing the way in which its central concepts: the Reidian foundationalism, the partial critique of evidentialism, warrant, proper function, reliability and externalism - are logically interrelated. A section of this article is reserved to the critiques of his account of warrant brought by Peter Klein and Richard Feldman and to the way in which Plantinga answered them, by developing the concepts of cognitive maxi- and mini-environment. In the end we will see the way in which Plantinga's epistemology relates to both modernism and postmodernism.

Keywords: Alvin Plantinga, epistemology, Reidian foundationalism, evidentialism, reliability.

Introduction

A central concept of epistemology is that of 'knowledge'. In his dialogue *Theaetetus*, Plato raised the question: 'What is it that which must be added to mere true belief to obtain knowledge?' In this way he suggested that a belief is *known* by us only when it is both true and justified (or warranted).

Alvin Plantinga, the philosopher whose epistemology we intend to present in this essay, prefers to use – when writing about knowledge and its essential components – the term 'warrant'; he makes a certain distinction between 'warrant' and 'justification'¹ – and defines warrant as '(that) elusive quality or quantity enough of which, together with truth and belief, is sufficient for knowledge'².

Plantinga was well known in the contemporary philosophical world for his contributions to the metaphysics of modality and to the philosophy of religion (especially on such topics as theodicy and the arguments for the existence of God). But starting with the 90'-s, Plantinga began to write intensively on epistemological subjects. As result, his trilogy on warrant: *Warrant: The Current Debate* (1993), *Warrant and Proper Function* (1993) and *Warranted Christian*

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¹ As we will see, Plantinga associates the term 'justification' with *internalism* – and considers that only the internalists identify warrant with justification. However, his option is for *externalism* – and for externalists there is a clear distinction between these two concepts.

² Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1993, p. v.

Belief (2000) won him (also) the fame of being one of the most prominent contemporary epistemologists.

Without entering in detail, we want to make a short note on what might be the central theme of Plantinga's epistemology: its *externalism*. In contrast with the internalists, who affirm that the knower can know that a certain belief has warrant (or justification) for her, and that she has epistemic access to whatever it is that makes for warrant, Plantinga is an externalist - who generally affirms that what makes true belief knowledge is the fact that it is produced by a reliable process.

In his own externalist model, Plantinga affirms that a belief has warrant only if it is produced by cognitive faculties functioning properly in a cognitive environment congenial to them, and according to a design plan successfully aimed at truth. In what will follow we will try to see how he arrived to this definition of warrant.

1. The relation between Plantinga's view and other contemporary's views on warrant

1.1. Foundationalism and coherentism; the main argument of foundationalism

There are two main views regarding the way in which a belief might get warrant in the contemporary epistemology: *foundationalism* and *coherentism*. The difference between these two positions lays in their attitude toward *circular reasoning*: the coherentist accepts this kind of reasoning, provided that the circle is large enough, the foundationalist rejects it.

For Plantinga, the main reason for foundationalist's rejection of circularity is the importance she gives to the idea of *propositional evidence*: of accepting one proposition on the evidential basis of another. This does not mean that by definition evidence for a foundationalist must be always propositional; there might be also – in J. Austin words – 'physical' evidence (for ex: the 'proofs' of a crime in a process: a pistol, a torn garment, traces of blood on clothes, etc)³ However, propositional evidence is crucial when trying to understand the differences between foundationalism and coherentism. According to the foundationalist, there is a foundational level of beliefs which are not accepted on the evidential basis of other beliefs. For example this category includes *self-evident beliefs* and *beliefs about how one is appeared to*. The other beliefs – those not included in the foundational level – will be accepted on the evidential basis of the foundational (or basic) beliefs.

Thus, the basic beliefs are the propositional evidence for the nonbasic beliefs. In a proper noetic structure, says the foundationalist, a nonbasic belief is accepted on the basis of other belief, which may be accepted on the basis of still

³ *Ibidem*, p. 177.

others, and so on; the chain might be in principle as long as one likes. However, due to the fact that we hold only finitely many beliefs, the chain must terminate somewhere, in some beliefs that are *foundational* (not accepted on the basis of other beliefs).

If there is a circle in the basis relation – belief A₀ is accepted on the basis of A₁, which is accepted on the basis of A₂,..., which is accepted on the basis of A_n, which is accepted on the basis of A₀ – then, says the foundationalist, the noetic structure is improper: that is because warrant cannot be generated only by warrant transfer. As Plantinga says: ‘A belief B can get warrant from another belief A by way of being believed on the basis of it, but only if A already *has* warrant. No warrant originates in this process whereby warrant gets transferred from one belief to another.’⁴

In conclusion, circular reasoning – argues the foundationalist – is improper. Therefore, in her view, foundationalism should be adopted, and coherentism rejected.

1.2. *Plantinga’s critique of coherentism*

Which is in this case the argument of the coherentist? If, as the aforementioned arguments of the foundationalist suggest, he approves circular reasoning, then he is clearly mistaken: one cannot get warrant for a belief just by showing that it is a member of a circular chain of beliefs – no matter how big this circle is.

However, the coherentist might have another option – suggests Plantinga. He might argue that warrant does not arise by warrant transfer, but by coherence itself: coherence is the only source of warrant.⁵ In this way (at least from the perspective of the pure coherentist⁶) a belief is not accepted on the evidential basis of any other belief, but on the basic way, ‘the warrant accruing to it (if any) arising by way of coherence’.⁷

Although so construed the coherentism seems to Plantinga more plausible, he stills considers it mistaken, and argues that coherence is neither necessary nor sufficient for warrant.⁸ Coherentism’s main problem is that in its case warrant involves only a relation between beliefs (coherence being a *doxastic* relation); yet the relation between experience and belief and environment and belief is also essential to warrant.⁹

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 178.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 179.

⁶ There might be also the mixed perspective of the *impure* coherentism, which would allow that there can be warrant transfer, but the warrant transferred arises originally by way of coherence.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 179.

⁸ Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1993, ch.4.

⁹ A. Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, p. vii, 179.

For example, says Plantinga, there is the case of the Lost Mariner, recounted by Oliver Sacks: ‘he suffered from Korsakov’s syndrome, a profound and permanent devastation of memory caused by alcoholic destruction of the mammillary bodies of the brain. He completely forgot a thirty-year stretch of his life, believing that he was 19 years old when in fact he was 49; he believed it was 1945 when in fact it was 1975. His beliefs (we may stipulate) were coherent; but many of them, due to this devastating pathology, had little or no warrant.’¹⁰

(At this point we are aware that many coherentists will not agree with this critique of their position. For example, there are some accounts of coherentism that also stress the role of evidence: see in this respect the view of such committed coherentists as Keith Lehrer¹¹, early Lawrence Bonjour and Thomas Bartelborth; these philosophers do not see coherence as a doxastic relation. However, Plantinga choosed to understand coherence in this way¹²; probably, from this perspective, he sees these non-doxastic versions of coherentism as rather camouflaged versions of fallible foundationalism¹³).

But even if to Plantinga coherentism is mistaken, and coherence is not the *only* source of warrant, he does not conclude that coherence is not *a* source of warrant: on the contrary, to him ‘the ordinary foundationalist can hold in perfect consistency that many beliefs get at least some warrant by way of coherence, and even that *some* beliefs get all their warrant solely by coherence’¹⁴.

¹⁰ A. Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate*, p. 81.

¹¹ Keith Lehrer, *Theory of Knowledge*, Routledge, London, 1990, p. 114; see also Mircea Flonta, *Cognitio: o introduce critica in problema cunoasterii*, Editura All, Bucuresti, 1994, p. 157-172.

¹² In a personal correspondence by email Alvin Plantinga confirmed to me that he holds this position.

¹³ Plantinga would probably hold that, since Lehrer and Bonjour accept the role of evidence in their accounts – but reject the infallibility of the propositions about our subjective states, their position in this respect is not essentially different from that of a fallible foundationalism – and we can say that in this respect the truth of the matter is rather a mixture between the coherentist and the foundationalist positions (see concerning this position A. Quinton, “The Foundations of the Knowledge”, in B. Williams, A. Montefiore (eds.), *British Analytical Philosophy*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1966, p. 86, cf. M. Flonta, *op. cit.*, p. 153). However, due to his adherence to a Reidian type of epistemology (which will be presented in this paper), Plantinga clearly prefers a rather fallible form of foundationalism than a moderate coherentism.

¹⁴ A. Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, p. 180. In my opinion the acceptance of *defeaters* and *overrides* in Plantinga’s account of warrant (*Warrant and Proper Function* p. 40-42) suggests that sometimes, in some respect, the appeal to coherence in his model is unavoidable. However, for a defence of a rather fallible foundationalism than coherentism he could appeal to Chisholm suggestions that the relationship between the *beliefs about what it appears to us* as true and *other beliefs* is not positive, but rather negative (R. Chisholm, *Theory of Knowledge*, (second edition), Prentice Hall Inc, Englewood Cliffs, 1977, ch..1, p. 75,76). More explicitly, Chisholm denies that before we decided that a belief about perceptions is reasonable, we should know that other judgments are evident; he agrees in this respect with Thomas Reid, who states that a basic belief

1.3. *Classical Foundationalism and its rejection by Plantinga*

As we already have seen, Plantinga believes that coherentism is wrong: this is a reason for him being a foundationalist.

However, he also rejects what he calls ‘classical foundationalism’, the kind of foundationalist position supported by such modern philosophers as Descartes and Locke – a perspective that was very influential from the Enlightenment to the present times (and functioning for many philosophers as an almost unquestioned assumption).

Before presenting this view, it is important to understand at this point the distinction which Plantinga does between the merely *descriptive* notion of *basic belief* and the mixed notion (descriptive but *also normative*) of *properly basic belief*.

A belief is *basic* if we *accept* it, but *not* on the *evidential basis of other beliefs*: (an example of this is $2+1=3$). The notion of *proper basicity* adds to the idea of basic acceptance the concept of normativity: ‘...a belief is *properly basic* for me if it is basic for me and I am *justified, violating no epistemical duties*, in accepting it in the basic way’¹⁵.

In the view of *classical foundationalism*, a belief is *properly basic* for somebody only if it is *self-evident* for her (for ex. ‘ $4-2=2$ ’) or *immediately about her experience (incorrigible)* (for ex. ‘I am being appeared to redly’)¹⁶. In his ‘*Warranted Christian Belief*’ Plantinga will add also to these two types of basic propositions – *pace* John Locke – another type: the propositions *evident to the senses* for a person (for ex. ‘My current ideas of treehood are caused by something external to me’)¹⁷.

We can see from his choice of the properly basic beliefs that for the classical foundationalist the *only* propositions that are admitted as *properly basic* are those that are *certain* for her.¹⁸

The classical foundationalists propose various kinds of evidential relationships if their belief in a proposition A is to be properly supported by other proposition B. Thus, Descartes seems to suggest that a proposition could be accepted in the superstructure of our noetic structure only if it is *deduced* or entailed from the propositions in the foundations. Plantinga observes that according to this standard very few of our beliefs would be acceptable to us.¹⁹ However, Locke admitted also in this respect a *probabilistic* support from the

should be accepted as true similar with the case of an accused before his judge (who has the right to the presumption of innocence until her guilt is reasonably proved).

¹⁵ A. Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate*, p. 19.

¹⁶ A. Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, p. 182.

¹⁷ A. Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000, p. 77.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 84.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

propositions of our foundations, and later on Charles Pierce admitted also a kind of supporting relationship similar to that between a scientific theory and its evidence – which he called ‘*abduction*’.

Plantinga summarizes in this way the classical foundationalist position (he called it CP):

(CP) ‘A belief is acceptable for a person if and only if it is either properly basic (i.e., self-evident, incorrigible, or evident to the senses for that person), or believed on the evidential basis of propositions that are acceptable and that support it deductively, inductively, or abductively.’²⁰

He also criticizes this view for more reasons:

First of all, he observes that the idea of restriction of *proper basicity* only to the classes of self-evident, incorrigible and evident to the senses beliefs ‘was subjected to devastating criticism by Thomas Reid, who pointed out that if it were true, very few of our beliefs would have warrant, and that (this) restriction (...) is at best arbitrary’.²¹

Secondly, he believes that classical foundationalism is self-referentially incoherent. It does not fulfill the conditions of justification that it lays down: according to classical foundationalism a belief is justified for us only if it is either properly basic (self-evident, incorrigible or evident to the senses) or accepted on the evidential basis of beliefs which are properly basic. But this belief is itself not properly basic and ‘it is at least extremely hard to see that it is evidentially supported by beliefs that do meet that condition’.²²

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 84-85.

²¹ A. Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, p. 182.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 182. However, there was at least one critique on Plantinga’s attack on classical foundationalism. Someone might deny that CP has no justification and that it is self-referentially incoherent. One might argue that in fact the principle might be supported by beliefs that meet the condition. She could use in this sense the ‘particularist’ method of finding a criterion for true propositions, proposed by Roderick Chisholm. According to this method one might start from the question ‘which extent has our knowledge?’ in order to arrive to the question ‘Which are the criterions of knowledge?’. Chisholm starts from considering the extent of commonsense truths and tries to deduce from this extent a criterion for knowledge (Roderick Chisholm, *Erkenntnistheorie*, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, München, 1979, p. 170-173; Noah Lemos, *Common Sense: A Contemporary Defense*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004, ch. 6). Philip Quinn uses this chisholmian particularist method in order to offer an inductive argument for CP. He tries to obtain a criterion of justified belief by gathering samples of justified and unjustified belief and suggesting a principle that fits them best. He assembles representative samples of beliefs (J) that he thinks are justified and representative samples of beliefs (U) that he thinks are unjustified. Afterwards, he observes that all of the beliefs from J but none of the beliefs from U conform to CP. For this reason, he concludes (inductively) that a belief is justified if and only if it conforms to CP (Philip Quinn, ‘The Foundations of Theism Again’ in Linda Zagzebski (ed), *Rational Faith: Catholic Responses to Reformed Epistemology*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 1993, p. 22ff). Plantinga replies to this argument by denying that (at least some of) the premises of Quinn’s argument are properly basic - as the classical picture suggests they should be. The sample

Moreover, Plantinga adds that the vast majority of contemporary philosophers renounced to it: 'It has remained for the twentieth century, however, to see it into the well-deserved retirement, and the moment the air is full of the announcements of the death of classical foundationalism'.²³

However, he does not agree with tendency of the (postmodernist) announcers of this 'death' to conclude that it entails the rejection of epistemology itself, or of the very notion of truth. To think so means for him 'to confuse species with example: it would be like announcing the demise of the nation-state upon noting a civil war in Yugoslavia'.²⁴ The only conclusion that follows about truth at best is only that we do not have Cartesian certainty about it. To him, ironically, those who draw these radical conclusions from the problems raised by classical foundationalism think in fact similar with its supporters; they 'betray concurrence with it: the only security or warrant for our beliefs, they and the classical foundationalist both think, must arise by way of evidential relationship to beliefs that are certain – that is, self-evident or about immediate experience'.²⁵

1.4. *Reidian Foundationalism*

As we already saw, Plantinga rejected classical foundationalism. Still, he defends a particular species of foundationalism which he names 'Reidian Foundationalism'.

A starting point for seeing the differences between the two sorts of foundationalism is to ask: which kinds of beliefs are properly basic? The classical foundationalist has taken as properly basic three types of beliefs: those *self-evident*, those *incorrigible* (immediately about the experience) and those *evident to the senses*. Plantinga agrees that these kinds of beliefs are properly basic. However, he adds that many other beliefs can also be taken as properly basic.

classes include propositions as *S1 is justified in believing B1* and *S2 is not justified in believing B2*. He observes that these beliefs are neither incorrigible nor evident to the senses. In this case, in order to conform to CP they must be self-evident (A. Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 96). However, says Plantinga, at first sight there seem to be no case of self-evident belief that is unjustified – such that the believer has gone contrary to his duty in holding it; that is because generally our beliefs are not in our direct control (ex: even if one is offered a million dollars, she cannot stop believing that she is over 30 years old). Still, he admits that there might be *some* cases of self-evidently unjustified beliefs (ex: out of vanity and pride one might form the belief that her work is unduly neglected when the fact is it gets more attention than it deserves). Still, the real problem of the CP supporter is that these cases 'lend no support to the claim that it is unjustified to form a belief that is neither properly basic (according to classical standards) nor believed on the basis of such propositions' (A. Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 97). Their support is too vague to holding an inductive argument of any sort. Moreover, he argues that there are cases where it is self-evident that some beliefs not formed in accord with CP are justified. For example, the beliefs produced by our memory are (in general) justified, but they do not satisfy the requirements of CP.

²³ A. Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, p. 182.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 183.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

Thomas Reid pointed out that the majority of our beliefs do not conform to CP condition. For example, our beliefs about the *past*, or about *other persons*, or about *external objects* (perceptive) are not, according to classical foundationalist, properly basic. They must be believed, from the classical foundationalist's point of view, on the evidential basis of the self-evident, incorrigible (immediately about her experience) and evident to the senses beliefs.²⁶

But Reid doubts that this is possible: he argues - and Plantinga agrees with him - that they are *also properly basic*.

And here is the great difference between the two positions: for example, although both accept that '*how I am appeared*' is crucial to the question whether a perceptual judgment has warrant for us, they differ in the way in which they relate the experience in question to the *perceptual judgment* triggered by it.²⁷

For the classical foundationalist a *belief* (for example a *perceptual* one) *has warrant* for us *only* if we believe it *on the basis of experiential propositions* that support it (by the mediation of deduction, induction or abduction). This view suggests at least three requirements:

1. That a person *should believe* the experiential propositions (ex: It seems to me that I see a dog.).

2. That she believes *the proposition* in question *on the evidential basis of those experiential propositions* ('I see a dog' is believed on the evidential basis of 'It seems to me that I see a dog').

3. That the experiential propositions *do offer in fact evidential support* for the proposition in question.²⁸

The Reidian view – says Plantinga – by contrasts, disputes each of these three demands. For the Reidian foundationalist, *when we are appropriately appeared to, and other conditions for warrant are met*,²⁹ then we have knowledge. Having these Reidian definition in mind, we could see – *pace* Plantinga – the Reidian motives for rejecting all three aforementioned classical foundationalist's requirements:

1. For the supporter of this view, it is *neither necessary* that we should *believe* the *experiential propositions* (of the type 'It seems to me that', or 'I am appeared to in this way') *nor to believe that the conditions for warrant are met*, in order *to have knowledge*. Of course, if we pay attention to our phenomenal field, it is probably impossible to fail to believe the aforementioned kind of experiential

²⁶ A. Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 98.

²⁷ A. Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, p. 183. See also Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Thomas Reid and the Story of Epistemology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001, p. 23-95.

²⁸ A. Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, p. 184.

²⁹ As we shall see, Plantinga defines in this way the conditions for warrant: that the cognitive capacities of the believer should function properly, in an appropriate environment, and according to a design plan successfully aimed at truth.

propositions. But it is not necessary to pay attention to this field (in fact, in normal situations we don't use to do that) – in order to have warrant for our beliefs. Important is not our *believing* that we are appeared in this way, but simply our *being* appeared in this way.

2. If it is not necessary to believe the experiential propositions, then *it is not necessary to believe the propositions in question* (in our example the perceptual propositions) *on the evidential basis* of the experiential propositions.

3. Moreover, it is not necessary that the experiential propositions should offer evidential support (deductive, inductive or abductive) for the propositions in question. What matters – and confers warrant to our proposition – is not the deductive, inductive or abductive support of the experiential propositions, but *the fact that they formed in the aforementioned proper circumstances for knowledge*: being appeared in that way, and satisfying the other conditions for warrant.³⁰

We will offer in what will follow two examples that show why Reid (and Plantinga) believes that the beliefs of common sense are true and properly basic.

Thus, arguing about the *existence of other persons*, Reid affirms that: 'No man thinks of asking himself what reason he has to believe that his neighbor is a living creature. He would be not a little surprised if another person should ask him so absurd a question: and perhaps could not give any reason which would not equally prove a watch or a puppet to be a living creature. But, though you should satisfy him of the weakness of the reasons he gives for his belief, you cannot make him in the least doubtful. This belief stands upon another foundation than that of reasoning and therefore, whether a man can give good reasons for it or not, it is not in his power to shake it off.'³¹

And arguing about *perceptual knowledge*, Plantinga says: 'Now I don't know how to prove to someone intent on denying perceptual knowledge that we really do have it. I don't know of any arguments that start from premises the perceptual skeptic already accepts sufficiently firmly (and accepts more firmly than he accepts perceptual skepticism) and proceed by argument forms he also already accepts, to the conclusion that we do have such knowledge. Prior to philosophical reflection, however, most of us assume that many of our perceptual judgments do constitute knowledge and thus meet whatever conditions are necessary for knowledge; this assumption is one of those natural starting points for thought of which Richard Rorty says there aren't any; and the rational stance is it to accept it unless there are sufficiently powerful argument against it. As far as I can see, however, the arguments against it are nowhere nearly sufficiently powerful (...) let me only say that they invariably employ premises whose claims on us (as G. E. Moore pointed out) are vastly more tenuous than the claims of the

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p.184.

³¹ Thomas Reid, 'Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man', in R. Beanblossom and Keith Lehrer (eds.), *Thomas Reid's Inquiry and Essays*, VI, 5, Hackett, Indianapolis, 1983, p. 278-279, cf. A. Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, p. 66.

denials of their conclusions. Accepting perceptual skepticism on the basis of these arguments is a little like rejecting *modus ponens* on the grounds that it figures in the derivation of the contradiction in the Russell paradoxes (...),³²

We could add also that the Reidian foundationalism is a fallibilist type of foundationalism. If the classical foundationalist admitted as properly basic only those propositions that were *certain* for her, the Reidian foundationalist accepted in the foundation of her noetic structure, in addition to certain propositions of this type, also propositions *that are not certain* (being therefore fallible).³³

1.5. Evidentialism

As we have seen, according to Plantinga, the classical foundationalist insisted that our beliefs are formed on the basis of evidence³⁴. For example, a perceptual proposition like 'I see a dog' is based on such evidence as the experiential proposition 'It seems to me that I see a dog'. The Reidian also accepted this idea, but added that the evidence needs not be only *propositional evidence*.

Thomas Reid added, for example – to this type of propositional evidence for the truth of a perceptual proposition – also the *evidence of the senses* (Plantinga will call it simply *perceptual evidence*). In this sense, Plantinga offers the image of a peculiarly rigid sort of person who sometimes ignores the evidence of his senses. He believes that cacti are to be found only in the southwest of United States. Somebody shows him a fine prickly pear in Michigan, but he stubbornly refuses to believe that this is a cactus, claiming that the plant is only a thistle. In this case, suggests Plantinga, the evidence is not propositional, but nevertheless, it has some features in common with propositional evidence – because the rigid gentlemen from our story accepted the belief in question in response to this evidence.

Therefore, Plantinga accepted as initially plausible the premise that whenever a belief has warrant for us, we should have evidence for it³⁵. And he agrees that for a wide variety of propositions 'a properly functioning person will come to believe them only if she has some evidence – either propositional evidence, or perceptual evidence, or the testimonial evidence, or evidence of some other sort'.³⁶ For example, he accepted the models of three important contemporary defenders of evidentialism – William Alston, Richard Feldman and Earl Conee (he called their type of evidentialism, after their initials: AFC) – as working well in the cases of propositional, testimonial³⁷ and perceptual evidence.

³² A. Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, p. 89-90.

³³ A. Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 84; Mircea Flonta, *Cognitio: o introducere critică în problema cunoașterii*, p. 147-149.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 82.

³⁵ A. Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, p. 185-186.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 187.

³⁷ Some readers will be tempted to believe that testimonial evidence is also a kind of propositional evidence. But Plantinga suggests that this is not the case. He offers in this respect an example:

However, he suggested that in a vast range of other ordinary cases their model is less plausible. He referred specifically to the case of *memory*, a *priory knowledge*, and *consciousness*.

In the case of *memory*, even if there is here a kind of phenomenal imagery, this is too partial, fragmentary and indistinct – to constitute a basis on which to form a belief. The imagery is here like ‘a decoration, an irrelevant accompaniment of some kind; it isn’t at all like propositional or perceptual evidence’.³⁸

The situation is similar in the case of *a priori* knowledge. We might have here also ‘a sort of scrappy and indistinct, partial and vague image (auditory or visual)’ of a sentence expressing a proposition, but *this image is not evidence*.³⁹

In the case of *consciousness*, he observed that our perceptual beliefs respond differentially to the changes in our experience, but that the associated beliefs about ourselves when holding these perceptual beliefs do not. For example, appeared to one way, I form the perceptual belief ‘I see a squirrel leaping’; appeared to another way, I form the belief ‘I see tiger lilies bending in the breeze’. But, says Plantinga, ‘there is a constant element in all of them: the part according to which it is I who perceive these things’.⁴⁰ Moreover, it is not by virtue of similarity among our experiences that we judge that it is I who does these things: ‘It is not as if, had my experience been appropriately different, I would have judged that it is someone else who sees the squirrel.’⁴¹

Thus, the ‘I think’ element from those beliefs in which occurs (of the form ‘I see...’, ‘I judge...’, ‘I believe...’) does not respond differentially to different experiential inputs. As result, that part of these judgments is *not formed on the basis of evidence* – and in this respect it resembles memory and *a priori* beliefs.

In conclusion, it seems that AFC model does not work well for *memory*, *a priori* knowledge and the ‘*I think*’ element associated to our *conscious beliefs*. In all these cases, we have indeed *sensuous* imagery, but this imagery is *not evidence*.

However, Plantinga agrees that this is not (necessary) all story: he says it might be possible that he did not look for evidence – even in these cases – *in the right place*. He observed that *sensuous imagery* is not the *only* phenomenal

‘You are a sixth grade; your teacher tells you that the population of China exceeds that of India; you believe him. Now, conceivably you could believe him on the basis of propositional evidence, reasoning as follows: “Teacher says the population of China exceeds that of India; in most of the cases where I have checked to see whether what he says is true, it was; so probably it is true in this instance; so probably the population of China exceeds that of India”. You *could* come to that belief in this way; but typically you would not (it would be a peculiar sixth grader who regularly formed beliefs in this fashion). In the typical case you would simply find yourself believing your teacher, just as, from days of earliest youth, you have always been inclined to believe your elders (*Ibidem*, p. 187).

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 188.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 188-189.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 189-190.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 190.

accompaniment of memory, *a priori* and the ‘I think’ type of beliefs. There is something else in the phenomenology associated to these types of beliefs: the sort of *felt inclination* or *impulsion* toward these beliefs.

For example, the *memory* belief has also, beyond its related sensuous phenomenology, a certain felt attractiveness: the proposition ‘I remember that Paul was there in California’ has a sense of rightness or appropriateness about it – as opposed to the proposition that it was Tom there.⁴²

In the similar way, the *a priori* beliefs have a sort of attractiveness or perceived fittingness about them, familiar to us all. And this fittingness, or felt inclination is present not just for memory or *a priori* beliefs, but also for perception or testimony, and so on. Returning to the AFC model, Plantinga observed that this model represents a better kind of evidentialism than the classical foundationalist model (who suggested that the *only* possible foundational evidences are the *propositional* ones: *the self-evident*, *the incorrigible*, and *the evident to the senses* beliefs) because it is more inclusive. Many other beliefs (for example the *perceptual beliefs* or the *beliefs of memory*) are also basic (for the AFC model).

However, if we want to be rigorous, the AFC model seems to be incorrect when it deals with *memory* and *a priori* beliefs – because these beliefs do not seem to qualify as evidences. So, it seems that in what concerns them, evidentialism fails – according to Plantinga – because it is not able to incorporate them.

But if we also understand as evidence the aforementioned ‘*inclination to believe*’ or ‘*perceived attractiveness*’ element, then the AFC model seems to be correct: it seems able to incorporate all known forms beliefs. As result, if we construe evidences in *this broad fashion*, then *apparently evidentialism* is a true epistemological concept: all beliefs – in order to have warrant – need to be based on evidences.⁴³

However, *even if, understood in this way*, evidentialism is a necessary condition for warrant, it still *does not follow that is also a sufficient condition*. The main reason is the problem of *malfunction*: a person seems to remember very well an event; still, her belief might nonetheless – by virtue of memory malfunction – have no warrant for her.

What is required for warrant is the absence of cognitive pathology – in other words, it is also necessary the *proper function* of her cognitive system. Evidence is necessary for warrant, but not sufficient: proper function is also required.⁴⁴

This is the reason why in the next chapter we will refer in detail to Plantinga’s notions of proper function and warrant.

⁴² *Ibidem*.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 192.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 193.

2. Plantinga's notion of warrant

Plantinga presented his view on warrant mainly in his 'Warrant and Proper Function', the second book from his trilogy on warrant. For this reason, in what will follow, we will refer especially to this book. In the first book from the trilogy – 'Warrant: The Current debate' – he presented a broad spectrum of contemporary accounts of warrant – for example, warrant as 'having adequate evidences' (already discussed in the previous chapter), warrant as 'epistemic duty'⁴⁵ (which figures in classical internalism), warrant as 'having a set the beliefs that is coherent'⁴⁶, warrant as 'having a reliable set of faculties – reliabilism'⁴⁷, etc. In each of these cases Plantinga argues that, although warrant is clearly connected with the respective epistemic value, the beliefs of the person who holds them fail in the end to have warrant, 'because of cognitive malfunction'⁴⁸.

2.1 Proper Function

As we saw when presenting Plantinga's view on evidentialism, one important critique of this account of warrant was related to its failure to deal with the cases of cognitive pathology. This problem, as we pointed above, affects – from his perspective – all other accounts of warrant.

For example, referring to Chisholm's dutiful agent, Plantinga says he meets Chisholm's conditions for warrant; his beliefs lack warrant, however, because 'they result from cognitive dysfunction due to a damaging brain lesion, or the machinations of an Alpha Centaurian scientist, or perhaps the mischievous schemes of a Cartesian evil demon'⁴⁹. The same kind of example could be suggested for the other accounts of warrant.

Therefore, Plantinga suggested that a necessary condition of a belief's having warrant is that our cognitive equipment be free of such malfunction, functioning properly. A belief has warrant for us, only if our cognitive apparatus 'is functioning properly, working the way it ought to work, in producing and sustaining it'.⁵⁰ More specifically, the parts of noetic equipment involved in the formation and sustenance of a belief should function properly⁵¹ if that belief is to have warrant to us.

⁴⁵ A. Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate*, ch. 2.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, ch. 4, 5, 6.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, ch. 9.

⁴⁸ A. Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, p. 4.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁵¹ Plantinga makes also a distinction between a *properly* functioning cognitive equipment and a *normally* functioning one (if we take this second term in a broadly statistical sense). A person's system might function far from the statistical norm, but it could still be functioning properly: After a nuclear disaster nearly all people could be left blind; nevertheless, the few sighted remained

However, proper function is not the whole story about warrant; another requirement for a belief is that it should be formed in an appropriate cognitive environment.

2.2. *Appropriate cognitive environment*

As we know, an automobile, even if it is in a perfect working order, does not run well on the top of a mountain or under water. In the same way, says Plantinga, a belief, even if produced by a properly working cognitive apparatus, has no warrant if it is formed in an inappropriate cognitive environment. He offers in this respect an example: 'You have just had your annual cognitive checkup at MIT; you pass with flying colors and are in splendid epistemic condition. Suddenly and without your knowledge, you are transported to an environment wholly different from earth; you awake on a planet revolving around Alpha Centauri. There conditions are quite different; elephants, we may suppose, are invisible to human beings, but emit a sort of radiation unknown on earth, a sort of radiation that causes human beings to form the belief that a trumpet is sounding nearby. An Alpha Centaurian elephant wanders by; you are subjected to the radiation, and form the belief that a trumpet is sounding nearby. There is nothing wrong with your cognitive faculties; they are working quite properly; still, this belief has little by way of warrant for you.'⁵²

As result, another component should be added to warrant: our faculties should function properly in an environment appropriate to our epistemic apparatus.

2.3. *Degrees of warrant*

To these components involved in his concept of warrant, Plantinga adds another one: that of degrees of warrant.

He observes that our cognitive faculties might work properly in an appropriate environment but some beliefs produced by them might have more warrant than others. He calls 'productively equivalent' those pair of beliefs that are produced by faculties functioning properly to the same degree and in environments equally appropriate; his opinion is that a pair of beliefs could be productively equivalent while one of them has more warrant than other.

Thus, the belief ' $7 + 5 = 12$ ' has more warrant for him than the rather dim and indistinct memory belief that 'forty years ago I owned a secondhand sixteen-gauge shotgun', but both beliefs are produced by properly functioning cognitive faculties functioning in an appropriate environment. Moreover, the first belief is also more firmly believed than the other.⁵³

would still have properly functioning eyes – although, statistically speaking, the blinded ones would have 'normal' sight (A. Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, p. 9-10).

⁵² *Ibidem*, p. 6.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

He concludes that, if both belief B and B* have warrant for a person S, then B has more warrant than B* for S if and only if S believes B more firmly than B*. Thus, knowledge demands both true belief and a certain degree of warrant⁵⁴.

2.4. *The Design Plan*

However, Plantinga observed that there might be some beliefs, produced by perfectly functioning faculties, in an appropriate environment, which could still lack warrant. For example, a person might believe that she will recover from a dread disease much more strongly than is justified by statistics of which she is aware. Sigmund Freud suggested that religion is an illusion which arises from the ‘oldest and strongest and most insistent wishes of mankind’⁵⁵. This idea, says Plantinga, suggests that according to Freud religious belief does not arise from cognitive malfunction of some cognitive module, but instead ‘by way of wish fulfillment’. Still, illusion and wish fulfillments have their functions in the life of human being. According to Freud, they enable humans ‘to mask the grim, threatening, frightening visage of the world’. As result, even if religious belief is not necessary the result of malfunction – being produced by cognitive faculties functioning as they should – it still does not enjoy warrant (at least it does not enjoy warrant if one accepts Freud’s view on it).

The problem in those two examples is that the elements in our cognitive faculties responsible for the producing of those beliefs – either optimism enabling one to survive a deadly illness, or wishful thinking – have not as their purpose the producing of true beliefs. On the contrary, they are aimed at something else: survival and capacity to carry on in our nasty world. In conclusion, another condition for warrant is that the design plan of our cognitive faculties involved in producing our beliefs should have as its goal true beliefs. Plantinga says in this respect: ‘What confers warrant is one’s cognitive faculties working properly, or working according to the design plan, *insofar as that segment of the design plan is aimed at producing true beliefs*.’⁵⁶

2.5. *Reliability*

Even if Plantinga added to the zeroeth approximation of his account of warrant (according to which ‘a belief has warrant for us only if it is produced by our cognitive faculties functioning properly in an appropriate environment’) also the condition that ‘the design plan governing the production of the respective

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 9.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 13.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 16. By the term ‘design’ Plantinga does necessary affirm that human beings have been literally designed – by God, for example. He uses this term in the sense in which Daniel Dennett uses it when saying that a given organism possesses a certain design – produced to him by evolution (A. Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, p. 13, Daniel Dennett, *Brainstorms*, Bradford Books, Cambridge, 1978, p. 12).

belief must be aimed at producing true beliefs' – he still belief that the model is insufficient. He gives in this sense an example (suggested by Richard Swinburne, Ian Foster and Thomas Senor): '...suppose a well meaning but incompetent angel – one of Hume's infant deities, say – sets out to design a variety of rational persons, persons capable of thought, belief and knowledge. As it turns out, the design is a real failure; the resulting beings hold belief, all right, but most of them are absurdly false'.⁵⁷

In this example, says Plantinga, all three suggested conditions for warrant seems to be met: the beliefs of these persons are functioning properly, in a cognitive environment for which they were designed, and the design plan governing her cognitive modules is aimed at truth. However, the beliefs of these beings do not have warrant.

Therefore, another condition needs to be added: that the design plan should be a good one (more precisely, the probability of a belief's being true – once it meets all three aforementioned conditions – should be high). This, says Plantinga⁵⁸, 'it is the reliabilist constraint on warrant, and the important truth contained in reliabilist accounts of warrant'.⁵⁹

2.6. Plantinga's notion of warrant

In conclusion we may sum up Plantinga's view on warrant in this way: a belief has warrant for us if and only if it is produced by properly functioning faculties, functioning in a congenial environment, and according to a design plan aimed at producing true beliefs that is good.

In his words: 'to a first approximation, we may say that a belief B has warrant for S if and only if the relevant segments (the segments involved in the

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 17; David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Part V, Bobbs-Merrill, 1947, p. 169.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 17.

⁵⁹ Plantinga agrees that we ordinarily take for granted that when our cognitive faculties (specifically those aimed at producing true beliefs), function properly in an appropriate environment, the beliefs they produce are for the most part true. If they are not for the most part true, then we have not proper function. Still, he holds this fourth condition (of *reliability*) because he wants to say that it is not *obviously* entailed by the notion of *proper function* itself (*Ibidem*, p. 18, 18n). For example, he offers in this respect a quotation from Patricia Churchland (where she clearly suggested that it is no evident correlation between a belief being produced by cognitive faculties functioning properly and its being true): 'Boiled down to essentials, a nervous system enables the organism to succeed in the four F's: feeding, fleeing, fighting and reproducing. The principle chore of nervous systems is to get the body parts where they should be in order that the organism may survive... Truth, whatever that is, definitely takes the hindmost' (Patricia Churchland, *Journal of Philosophy* 84, October 87, p. 548). It is true, Hume's infant deity intended that the design plan of his creature's cognitive system be aimed at truth (although he did not achieve his goal); by contrast, the evolutionary mechanism about which Churchland speaks, although has to do also with the cognitive faculties, is aimed at survival. However, Churchland quotation is still relevant for the distinction Plantinga wanted to make between reliability and proper function.

production of B) are functioning properly in a cognitive environment sufficiently similar to that for which S's faculties are designed; and the modules of the design plan governing the production of B are (1) aimed at truth, and (2) such that there is a high objective probability that a belief formed in accordance with those modules (in that sort of cognitive environment) is true.'⁶⁰

3. Plantinga's externalism

3.1. The Gettier problems

The philosopher Edmund Gettier published in 1963 a three-page paper⁶¹ which, in Plantinga's words, 'has wrought havoc in contemporary epistemology'⁶². As its title said, the paper questioned the old view that knowledge is justified true belief. In Gettier's opinion, belief, truth and justification are not sufficient for knowledge. One of his arguments in this regard (retold by Plantinga) was the following: 'Smith comes into your office bragging about his new Ford, shows you the bill of sale and title, takes you for a ride in it, and in general supplies you with a great deal of evidence for the proposition that he owns a Ford. Naturally enough you believe the proposition *Smith owns a Ford*. Acting on the maxim that it never hurts to believe an extra truth or two, you infer from that proposition its disjunction with *Brown is in Barcelona* (Brown is an acquaintance of yours about whose whereabouts you have no information). As luck would have it, Smith is lying (he does not own a Ford) but Brown, by happy coincidence, is indeed in Barcelona. So your belief *Smith owns a Ford or Brown is in Barcelona* is indeed both true and justified; but surely you can't properly be said to *know* it.'⁶³

As one can easily observe, in this case it is inferred a justified true belief from a justified false belief (that Smith owns a Ford). Therefore, some of the early attempts at repairing the classical view on knowledge as justified belief was to stipulate that a belief constitute knowledge only if it is true and justified, and its justification is not obtained by inference from a false belief.

But this is not the solution to Gettier problems. Some philosophers modified the aforementioned example so as to avoid the appeal to false premises when justifying the conclusion.⁶⁴ There are also other Gettier examples which avoid this problem. For example, one of them, formulated by Bertrand Russell (and thus predating Gettier's birth) sounds like this: A person happens to look at noon to a clock that stopped at midnight (previous night). His belief (that it is now 12.00) is true and in a sense justified, but clearly not knowledge.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ A. Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, p. 19.

⁶¹ Edmund Gettier, 'Is justified True Belief Knowledge?', *Analysis* 23, 1963, p. 121-123.

⁶² A. Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, p. 32.

⁶³ *Ibidem* p. 32.

⁶⁴ R. Feldman, 'An alleged Defect in Gettier Counter-Examples', in P. K. Moser, A. van der Nat (eds), *Human Knowledge*, Oxford University Press, 1987, p. 266.

⁶⁵ Bertrand Russell, *Problems of Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1912, p. 132.

There have been many other attempts to provide a ‘fourth condition’⁶⁶ (beyond the three conditions that characterize the classical view of knowledge: truth, acceptance of it – belief, and justification of its acceptance), and many attempts to add an epicycle or two to circumvent Gettier. However, in Plantinga’s opinion, ‘in most cases the quick response has been another counterepicycle that circumvents the circumvention – which then calls for a counter-counterepicycle, and so on...’⁶⁷ He thinks that the Gettier examples really show that the *internalist* accounts of warrant – the accounts which suggest that *the knower can know that a certain belief has warrant* (or justification) for her, and that *she has epistemic access to whatever it is that makes for warrant* – are fundamentally wanting. The common denominator of Gettier kinds of examples is – in Plantinga’s view – the fact that in each of these cases it is merely by accident that the justified true belief in question is true. It just *happened* that Brown is in Barcelona, or that the clock stopped at midnight and the viewer happened to look at it exactly at noon.

In the above mentioned cases, although a true belief was formed and the faculties involved were functioning properly, there was still no warrant; the reason for this had to do with the *local cognitive environment* in which the beliefs in question were formed. This environment was in a way or other misleading; it deviated from the paradigm situations for which the faculty in question has been designed. Thus, the usually reliable Smith was lying (*credulity* is part of our design plan whereby for the most part we believe what our fellows will tell us, but this principle does not work well when our fellows lie); in a similar way the clock has unexpectedly stopped (the clock does not function in the paradigm situation for which it was designed to be used).⁶⁸

What is important in Gettier situations is that here the believer is justified in her beliefs, having done all that could be expected of her, and that the final lack of warrant ‘is in no way to be laid to her account’. *Internalism* in epistemology is a view about cognitive accessibility according to which what confers warrant to a belief ‘must be *accessible*, in some special way’, to us. In all Gettier cases the cognitive glitch – observes Plantinga – ‘has to do with what is not accessible to the agent in this way.... What is essential to Gettier situations is the production of a true belief that has no warrant – despite conformity to the design plan in those aspects of the whole cognitive situation that are internal, in the appropriate sense, to the agent... There is conformity to the design plan on the part of the *internal*

⁶⁶ See in this respect Carl Ginet, ‘The Fourth Condition’, in D.F. Austin (ed.), *Philosophical Analysis. A defence by Example*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht, 1988.

⁶⁷ A. Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, p. 32. Plantinga suggests in this respect the ‘penetrating and encyclopedic account of this literature’ of Robert Shope (*The Analysis of Knowing*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1983).

⁶⁸ However, Plantinga offered also another example – *pace* Meinong – which suggested that the cognitive glitch in the Gettier cases is not necessary related to our cognitive environment: it could be also associated with the malfunctioning of the agent’s faculties (Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, p. 35-36).

aspects of the cognitive situation, but some feature of the cognitive situation *external* (in the internalist sense) to the agent forestalls warrant'.⁶⁹

In conclusion, Plantinga believes that the real significance of Gettier problems is that they show justification, conceived internalistically, to be insufficient for warrant; by contrast the *externalist* accounts of warrant will enjoy a certain immunity to these problems.⁷⁰

3.2. *A critique of Plantinga's solution to Gettier problems*

Some philosophers questioned the idea that Plantinga's understanding of warrant is able to solve the Gettier problems.⁷¹ For example Peter Klein offered an example that suggests that a belief could meet Plantinga's conditions of warrant and still be true by accident: 'Jones believes that she owns a well-functioning Ford. She forms this belief in perfectly normal circumstances using her cognitive equipment that is functioning just perfectly. But as sometimes normally happens, unbeknownst to Jones, her Ford is hit and virtually demolished – let's say while is parked outside her office. But also unbeknownst to Jones, she has just won a well-functioning Ford in the Well-Functioning Ford Lottery that her company runs once a year'.⁷²

In the aforementioned example it is clear that, had Jones' Ford not been hit and demolished, Plantinga's conditions for warrant would have obtained and Jones would have known that she owned a Ford. But in the actual situation her belief is produced, according to Klein, by the very same processes functioning in the same way in the same cognitive environment. As result, either these both situations are ones in which Jones knows that she owns a Ford, or not. But clearly one is a case of knowledge, the other one not. Therefore Plantinga's view on warrant is wrong.

3.3. *Plantinga's answer to this critique*

In his 'Respondeo'⁷³ to Klein, Feldman and other critiques of his account of warrant (and in his essay 'Warrant and accidentally true belief'⁷⁴), Plantinga

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 36. In fact, as John Greco suggests, truth is by definition a feature external, outside - in the ultimate sense - to our epistemic access (John Greco, 'Justification Is not Internal' in Mattias Steup, Ernest Sosa (eds.), *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 2005, p. 257-269).

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 36-37.

⁷¹ See in this respect Peter Klein, 'Warrant, Proper Function, Reliabilism and Defeasibility' and Richard Feldman, 'Plantinga, Gettier, and Warrant' in Jonathan Kvanvig (ed.), *Warrant in Contemporary Epistemology: Essays in Honor of Plantinga's Theory of Knowledge*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, London, 1996; Anhold Thorsten, *Gettier, Korrekte Epistemische Funktion und der Vernünftige Glaube an die Existenz des Christlichen Gottes – Eine Kritische Auseinandersetzung mit Alvin Plantingas Rechtsfertigungsbegriff*, Inauguraldissertation zur Erlangung des Grades eines Doktors des Philosophie im Fachbereich Philosophie und Geschichtswissenschaften der Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main, 2004, p. 81-83.

⁷² Peter Klein, 'Warrant, Proper Function, Reliabilism and Defeasibility', p. 105.

⁷³ Alvin Plantinga, 'Respondeo', in Jonathan Kvanvig (ed.), *Warrant in Contemporary Epistemology: Essays in Honor of Plantinga's Theory of Knowledge*, p. 307-378.

answered to this challenge by developing a distinction between cognitive *maxi-environments* and *mini-environments*. A cognitive *maxi-environment* is to him more global and general than a cognitive mini-environment. Thus, the cognitive maxi-environment on our planet would include such (macroscopic) features as the presence of air and light with their properties, of some objects detectable by our cognitive systems, of other people, of the regularities of nature, etc. Our cognitive faculties are designed (by God, or by evolution or by both God and evolution) to function in this maxi-environment (or other environment similar to it). On the other side, a cognitive maxi-environment might contain many different *cognitive mini-environments*: for example, some in which Jones' Ford is hit and destroyed by another vehicle, or one in which her Ford is not hit and destroyed.

The important idea here is that some cognitive mini-environments are *misleading* (for example that in which Jones' car is destroyed). In these cases (where the maxi-environments are right but the mini-environment are wrong) we have not warrant and knowledge. A belief could still be true - but only by accident - and therefore it could not qualify as knowledge.

In Plantinga's words, 'S knows p, on a given occasion, only if S's cognitive mini-environment, on that occasion, is not misleading - more exactly, not misleading with respect to the particular exercise of cognitive powers producing the belief that p. So the conditions of warrant need an addition: the maxi-environment must indeed be favorable or appropriate, but so must also the cognitive mini-environment.'⁷⁵ A mini-environment will be considered favorable for an exercise of our cognitive faculties when this exercise *can be counted on* to produce a true belief in that cognitive environment.⁷⁶

However, this account of warrant seems to Anhold Thorsten not very convincing. He raised the question: when do we really know that our mini-environment is favorable for our faculties? Which are the criteria for 'favorableness'?⁷⁷

Plantinga's answer: 'when the exercise of our faculties can be counted on to produce true belief in the respective cognitive environment' does not seem very satisfactory to him, probably because Thorsten would continue to ask: 'but how could we know that the exercise of our faculties can be counted on to produce true beliefs?'.

⁷⁴ Alvin Plantinga, 'Warrant and accidentally true belief', *Analysis* 57, 1997, p. 140-145.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, 143-144.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 144.

⁷⁷ 'Das Problem, das sich nun stellt, ist, wann eine Mini-Umgebung für die Ausübung unserer kognitiven Fähigkeiten bzw. epistemischen Module für günstig zu befinden ist? Welche Kriterien für Günstigkeit gibt es? Diese Fragen werden von Plantinga leider nicht näher erörtert, so daß eine tatsächliche Bestätigung über des Gerechtfertigsein von Meinungen einer bestimmten Person S nicht erfolgen kann' (Anhold Thorsten, *Gettier, Korrekte Epistemische Funktion und der Vernünftige Glaube an die Existenz des Christlichen Gottes – Eine Kritische Auseinandersetzung mit Alvin Plantingas Rechtfertigungsbegriff*, p. 83.).

In our opinion, Plantinga would answer to this critique to his model by pointing that – as in fact he did in a certain measure in his ‘Warrant and accidentally true belief’ – ‘our cognitive faculties are not maximally effective – not only that there is much we aren’t capable to know, but also in that we are sometimes prone to err, even when the maxi-environment is right and the relevant faculties are functioning properly’.⁷⁸

In other words, many times it is impossible for us to have access to whatever it makes for warrant. Due to Plantinga’s option for an externalist epistemology, he believes that we may sometimes think we know something when in fact we do not, and conversely, that we may sometimes know something without being able to offer (all) evidences for this knowledge (in other words, we might know something without knowing that we know it). An externalist, in opposition to the supporter of internalism, has a more robust sense of our human finitude, being adept of a more modest kind of epistemology.

Conclusion

We are able now to draw some conclusions and to offer a summary of what we presented in this essay.

William Alston said – referring to the book *Warrant and Proper Function* – said that Plantinga’s account of warrant represents ‘a contribution of the first order of importance to epistemology’. We believe that this epistemology offers indeed an interesting view of knowledge, a view that is both plausible and convincing. Plantinga, of course, does not build this epistemology on void; on the contrary, he created it in a constant dialogue with other traditional and contemporary views on warrant. In many cases he agreed with certain parts of these accounts and incorporated them in his own model of warrant. Thus, as we saw, he is a defender of a Reidian kind of foundationalism (our knowledge has foundations, but these foundations are fallible and include also the beliefs of common sense knowledge).

He is also agreeing – in a certain measure – with evidentialism (our knowledge is based on evidences – seen in a broad sense – although these evidences are insufficient for a comprehensive model of warrant); but he also rejects the mainstream versions of evidentialism. Moreover, he agrees with reliabilism (our cognitive faculties need to be reliable; the probability of a belief produced by them being true should be high in order to have knowledge. But again, Plantinga sees this condition as only necessary, not also sufficient for his account for warrant).

And, as we saw at the end of our essay, he is an externalist (for him a knower need not have epistemic access to whatever it is that makes for warrant:

⁷⁸ Alvin Plantinga, ‘Warrant and accidentally true belief’, p. 144-145.

she may sometimes think she knows something when in fact she does not, and conversely, she may sometimes know something without knowing that she knows it or how she knows it).

His position in relation to such debates as *modernism* versus *postmodernism* is also original: he disagrees in a certain measure with both philosophical perspectives, although in part agrees with some of their insights too. Thus, against modernism (especially classical foundationalism), he agrees that we no more could claim for truth the Cartesian kind of certainty suggested by modernists. But against postmodernism, he does not see in this partial relativisation of truth the disappearing of the very concept of truth and the ‘death’ of epistemology (which are proclaimed by some postmodernists).⁷⁹

In the end Plantinga combines all these classical and contemporary insights in a unique and original synthesis.

His account on warrant is also essential for his religious epistemology (and his philosophy of religion in general) – but the religious implications of his epistemology are complex, and do not constitute the object of this essay.

⁷⁹ Speaking about some postmodern claims about the ‘death’ of truth, Plantinga affirms that their supporters sometimes ‘seems to oscillate between a momentous but clearly false claim (there is no such thing as truth at all) and a sensible but rather boring claim (there is no such thing as truth, conceived in some particular and implausible way)’. (Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 425). That is because they generally will not deny that there is such a thing as the things are – associated with the commonsensical view on truth; rather they will tend to say there is no such thing as truth *understood a certain way*, for example, requiring a ‘detailed structural correspondence between the way the world is and English or German sentences’ (*Ibidem* p. 425). To the more specific view of Rorty that we do not discover but rather construct the truth Plantinga offers, among other objections, one that he considers fatal (against it). He admits that there is a sense in which we could say that truths are made by human beings: we make it the case that a given sequence of sounds or marks is, indeed, a sentence and thus capable of being true or false. But from this it would not follow ‘that we make a given sentence *true* or that it is by virtue by something we do that a given sentence is in fact true. We make it the case that the sequence of marks ‘There once were dinosaurs’ is a sentence and thus capable of being true or false. It does not follow that we make it true that there once were dinosaurs’ (*Ibidem*, p 435; see also in this respect William Alston, ‘Yes, Virginia, There Is a Real World’, *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, 52, No. 6, 1979, p. 779-808).